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SOCIAL CLASS FACTORS IN THE COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT OF MARRIED STUDENTS.

BY- ESHLEMAN, J. ROSS HUNT, CHESTER L.
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIV., KALAMAZOO

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THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY WAS TO DETERMINE THE ROLE OF SOCIAL STATUS IN THE ATTRACTION AND RETENTION OF MARRIED COLLEGE STUDENTS. A SECONDARY PURPOSE WAS TO DELINEATE THE ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS WHICH MARRIED MALE STUDENTS OF DIFFERENT SOCIAL STATUS LEVELS FACE ON THE COLLEGE CAMPUS. PERSONAL INTERVIEWS WERE HELD WITH THE 282 FULL-TIME MARRIED STUDENTS (249 MALES AND 33 FEMALES) LIVING ON CAMPUS. DATA WERE DRAWN FROM AN INTERVIEW SCHEDULE OF APPROXIMATELY 150 QUESTIONS WHICH HAD BEEN PRETESTED BY A CLASS IN METHODS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH. INTERVIEWERS WERE SELECTED FROM GRADUATE STUDENTS IN SOCIOLOGY AND EDUCATION WHO HAD PARTICIPATED IN A TRAINING SESSION CONDUCTED BY THE SUPERVISOR OF FIELD TRAINING IN THE SOCIAL WORK CURRICULUM. THE SCHEDULE INCLUDED PERSONAL DATA. SOCIAL STATUS DATA, ASPIRATION DATA, COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT DATA, AND SITUATIONAL FACTORS. ANALYSES HAD TWO AIMS--(1) DETERMINING THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SOCIAL STATUS BACKGROUND, COURTSHIP EXPERIENCES, AND THE LEVEL OF ASPIRATION, AND (2) ESTABLISHING VARIATIONS IN PATTERNS OF COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT BY SOCIAL STATUS BACKGROUND. MAJOR CONCLUSIONS SEEMED TO INDICATE THAT (1) THE MARRIED STUDENTS HAD A SOCIAL STATUS BACKGROUND SLIGHTLY LOWER THAN THE SINGLE STUDENTS, (2) IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES BY SOCIAL STATUS BACKGROUND WERE FOUND IN THE EDUCATION OF THE WIFE, HER TENDENCY TO CONTINUE HER STUDIES, AND WHETHER OR NOT THE COUPLE MET ON CAMPUS, AND (3) SEVERAL AREAS OF ADJUSTMENT WERE PROBLEMS TO MARRIED STUDENTS FROM ALL SOCIAL STATUS LEVELS. (HB)

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Title: SOCIAL CLASS FACTORS IN THE COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT OF MARRIED STUDENTS

Investigators: J. Ross Eshleman and Chester L. Hunt

Institution: Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan

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BACKGROUND

This study is concerned with two post war phenomena in higher education; the increased ratio of married to single students and the increased proportion of college students from a lower class background. The inquiry was so concerned with whether or not the two phenomena were related and with the type of adjustments faced by married students in general. If college marriage is primarily a refuge for lower class students fleeing the middle class milieu of the campus then one may assume it will decline as the mobile section of the American lower class acquires the respect for the Deferred Gratification Pattern which is said to characterize middle class culture. On the other hand, if college marriage attracts youth across social class lines then it is more likely to be a long term trend.

In either event, the adjustment of married students and the extent to which this adjustment is influenced by social class background constitute important areas of study. If married youth can manage their finances without special help or excessive employment, study in about the same fashion as single youth, and find satisfaction in campus activities, then colleges will not have to make many adjustments in their behalf. If they find problems in these areas, then appropriate action should be considered. It is certainly important for educators, and for that matter, the general public, to understand the composition of the college student married population and its adjustment to campus life.

OBJECTIVES

The major objective of the reported research is to ascertain the role of social status in the attraction and retention of married college students and to delinfate the adjustment problems which married male students of different social status levels face on the college campus. In line with this broad objective, the study intends to:

1. Determine the extent to which courtship and engagement patterns of the college married male vary by social status background.

2. Determine the extent to which social status background affects the aspiration level of married male college students.

3. Determine the extent to which social status background affects various patterns of college adjustment including:

    a. the continuity of college careers for wives of student husbands
    b. the effect of marriage on grades
    c. the students grade trends in college and high school
    d. the wife's assistance in studying
    e. the husbands study habits
    f. the husbands satisfaction with grades, attitude toward the marking system and class attendance
    g. the planning of children
    h. the employment patterns of the male
    i. the effect of student employment patcerns on his grades
    j. the parent and in-law relationships including their approval of the marriage, their residence distance from their children, the frequency of visits, and the extent of financial support
    k. the participation in campus activities including the subjective satisfaction with social participation, the participation as individuals or couples, the frequency of neighborly visiting and the extent of participation in various organizations and athletics.
    l. the participation in off campus activities
    m. the patterns of mate employment
    n. the amount of indebtedness
    o. the religious participation

p. their overall reactions to marriage
q. the adjustment to the presence of children, and
r. their adjustment to college housing

4. Test certain conflicting theoretical assumptions about social status variations on a college campus using the married student survey as a test case.

5. Clarify various problem areas of married students to provide guidance and insight to future married students, parents, or college administrators.

6. Complete a pilot study which may serve as a model for the development of more extensive research in this area.

PROCEDURE

The universe of the present study consisted of all full-time married students who were living in campus housing at Western Michigan University. Since the respondents included only the married students who were living on campus, the findings are not necessarily representative of all married students at Western Michigan University. Western Michigan University is a state supported institution located in Kalamazoo, Michigan with a current enrollment of approximately 14,000 students.

Personal interviews were held with each of the 282 full-time married students living on campus. This included 249 males and 33 females. Data were drawn from an interview schedule of approximately 150 questions which had been pretested by a class in methods of social research. The interviewers were selected from graduate students in sociology and education and had participated in a training session conducted by the supervisor of field training in the social work curriculum.

The interview schedule included <u>personal data</u> such as sex, age, premarital dating patterns, length of marriage, number of children, and student classification; <u>social status data</u> on the occupation and education of parents and parents-in-law as the basis for determining social class status; <u>aspiration data</u> on occupational goal and curriculum as well as the extent of parental and mate influence on the choice of occupational goal and curriculum; <u>college adjustment data</u> such as continuity of college career, parental moral and financial support, marital satisfaction, study habits, attitude towards grades, class participation, planning of children, employment

patterns, consensus on financial decisions, visits to parents or in-laws, campus and off-campus participation, amount and form of indebtedness, attitudes toward school, change in occupational goal and curriculum, and religious participation; and <u>situational factors</u> such as the presence of children, and the adjustment to housing.

The analysis has two aims: (1) determining the relationships between social status background, courtship experiences, and the level of aspiration, (2) establishing variations in patterns of college adjustment by social status background. The entire population of married college students who live in university housing is studied; therefore, the respondents comprised a universe rather than a sample and tests of significance were not deemed to be appropriate.

The principle independent variable of the present study is social status. For this study it was decided that education and occupation appeared to be the most relevant and valid measures of the social status dimension. Since all of the respondents were college students and were naturally limited in the type of employment open to them, and since by definition, as college students they would have a generally high level of education with little variability, the questions were asked in terms of their parents' status. From the education and occupation of the parents, the social status level of each respondent was inferred. It is assumed that this procedure is justifiable since children are ascribed the social status level of their parents.

For the purposes of analysis, it was necessary to decide if either single measure, occupation or education, was a valid indicator of the social status background of the married student. It is generally assumed that these two

variables are highly related. This is supported by our own preliminary analysis. However, the tested result indicated that only 60 to 64 percent of the occupational score variation is explained by education. Therefore, these two variables, occupation and education, were combined into a single social status background index. The respondents of the social status index were subdivided into a high, middle, and low status background group, commonly referred to as HSB, MSB and LSB.

The major data of the study consisted of answers to schedule questions which are cross-tabulated for social status background and for other factors such as curriculum and the presence or absence of children. Data are presented in tabular form in terms of percentages and related to the major hypotheses.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Comparative Status of Single and Married Students

(a) There was little difference in the North-Hatt occupational score between the fathers of unmarried, male, upperclass students and the fathers of male students living in University housing. In both cases approximately 77 percent of the fathers had an occupation score of 75 or below.

(b) Fathers of single, male, upperclass students had a slightly higher educational level than the fathers of married male students living in University housing. Approximately 43 percent of the fathers of the married students had finished high school as compared to 50.7 percent of the fathers of single students. Similarly 15.8 percent of the fathers of single students were college graduates as compared to 9.5 percent of the fathers of married students.

(c) The conclusion is that there is some tendency for married students to come from a lower social status background but this tendency is not strong enough to justify the hypothesis that college marriage is primarily a refuge for lower class youth seeking to escape the middle class milieu of the campus.

2. G.I. Bill and Social Status Composition

No major difference appeared to exist between the social status background of male students receiving G.I. bill benefits and others. Approximately 28 percent of both groups were classified in the lower status back-

ground category. A slightly lower proportion of G.I. students were placed in the highest category and a somewhat larger proportion in the middle status category.

3. Social Status Endogamy

(a) Within each status level a larger proportion of married male students married outside their status level than inside the status level.

(b) Within each status level a larger proportion of the wives had married men outside their status level than inside their status level.

(c) Within each social status grouping married male students form the largest proportion of the people marrying within that status level as compared to other status groups.

(d) Within each status level more of the wives of married male students have been drawn from that status level than from any other group.

(e) Social status exogamy for each status level was most apt to take place in the adjacent status level.

(f) No difference existed between sexes in the tendency to marry up or down in the social status level. Sixty-five percent of the HSB men married down as compared to the same percentage of HSB women. Sixty-three percent of LSB men married up as compared to 66 percent of LSB women. Twenty-five percent of the MSB males married up as compared to 28 percent of the MSB females.

4. Religious Endogamy

Approximately 75 percent of the male students married a female from the same religious background.

(a) Religious endogamy was most pronounced among the males from the lower status group where approximately 80 percent married within their religious background. This compares to approximately 68 percent of the highest status group who married within their religious background.

(b) The rate of religious exogamy was twice as high among Catholic male students as among Protestant male students. The percentage figures were 13.5 percent for Catholics as compared to only 6 percent for Protestants.

(c) A high rate of religious endogamy is apparently explained by the fact that Protestants make up approximately 84 percent of the total student body at Western Michigan University. It was, therefore, mathematically likely that the great majority of Protestant students would find a mate within their own religious background. A comparison was made between students who met their mate on the campus and those whose mate was met elsewhere than the campus and no important difference emerged. This would be expected since the district from which the University draws most of its students is also heavily Protestant.

5. Courtship Experience

(a) More than two-thirds of all of the married male students had dated their wife for a period of a year or longer before marriage.

(b) The middle status group have a larger number of students with a premarital acquaintance of more than one year than was true of either lower or higher status groups.

(c) The length of engagement shows a pattern which has a curvilinear type of relationship. More than one-half of the students were engaged from six to twelve months. About one-fifth of the students were engaged for more than a year, and slightly more than a fourth of the students had engagements which ran five months or less.

(d) Extremes in the engagement period were most characteristic of the highest social status group which had both the largest proportion of short term engagements, that is, less than six months, and of long term engagements which ran for longer than one year.

(3) Seventy percent of the students met their mate elsewhere than the college campus.

(f) The probability of meeting the mate on the college campus varied inversely with social status background. Approximately one in three males from the higher status background met their mates on the campus as compared to one in four males from the lower status background. The higher the social status background the greater probability of the wife having gone beyond high school.

(g) Data on the time interval between marriage and the date of birth on the first child indicated a possibility that about 13 percent of the total sample might have conceived outside of wedlock. There was no important variation by social status in this rate which was 11.9 percent for high status background, 13 percent for low status, and 13.5 percent for middle status.

6. Aspiration and Curriculum

(a) Enrollment in the education curriculum varied inversely with social status, including 51 percent of the lower status group, 41 percent of the middle group, and 36 percent of the higher group.

(b) G.I. support students did not follow this pattern and showed a larger proportion of the lower status group in a business curriculum and a smaller proportion in the education curriculum.

(c) Shifts in curriculum and occupation goal characterized all status groups. Forty-three percent of the students reported that their occupational goal had changed while in college and 47 percent reported a curricular change. There was no important variation by social status background, or G.I. Bill status.

7. Continuity of College Careers for Married Male Students

Approximately 16 percent of the male students reported that they had dropped out of school after marriage for periods of time varying between one semester and four years. There was no major variation by social status background.

8. Educational Status of the Wives of Married Male Students

(a) Approximately 11 percent of the wives of married male students were continuing full-time study in school. Fifteen percent of the wives had graduated from college and 39 percent had not been students at the time of their marriage.

(b) Although there is a high degree of educational homogomy at the time of the marriage it was evident that disparity in educational achievement would develop since only 30 percent of the wives had more than a high school education, and most of the wives were not continuing school work.

(c) The growth of educational disparity between husband and wife will be greatest among those from the lower social status background group. Sixty-four percent of the wives in this group either did not complete high school or go beyond high school as contrasted to 16 percent of the highest status group. The wives from the lowest status group were also the least apt to be in school at the time of the study.

(d) Child bearing was a special hazard to continuing the wives education since only 10 percent of the wives with children were either full or part-time students as compared to approximately 29 percent of the wives who were childless.

(e) The wives married to high social status background husbands were most apt to have had their education interrupted by marriage and were also most apt to be continuing in school.

(f) Wives of middle status background husbands were the most likely to be full-time students.

9. Effect of Marriage on Grades

(a) The effect of marriage on grades varied inversely with social status. Sixty-eight percent of men from the LSB reported that marriage

improved their grades as contrasted to 57 percent in the MSB and 64 percent from the HSB.

(b) The majority of students reported that their grades had improved in college as contrasted to high school.

(c) Grade improvement varied inversely with social status. This was true of 59.7 percent of the HSB and 43.5 percent of the LSB.

(d) The difficulties of the lowest status group came from those enrolled in other than the education curriculum. Only 30.4 percent from the lowest group enrolled in these curricula reported that their grades had improved as contrasted to 67.6 percent from the highest group.

(e) Only 44 percent of the students holding jobs reported that their employment interfered with their grades.

(f) The feeling that work interfered with grades varied inversely with the number of hours worked. Only 17 percent of the students who worked less than 19 hours per week felt that their grades were adversely affected. On the other hand, 37.5 percent of those working 40 hours a week or more still felt that employment didn't affect their grades.

(g) Sixty percent of the married males claimed that their wives assisted them in studying. There appeared to be no consistant relationship between the tendency of the wife to assist the husband in studying and either the presence of children or the extent of the wife's education.

(h) Eighty-nine percent of the male students reported they studied six hours a week or more. The MSB group indicated the smallest proportions

studying under six hours a week and the HSB group indicated the highest proportion. The lowest group had the largest proportion of students studying more than 16 hours per week.

(i) There was a slight tendency for hours of study to vary with curricula. Fourteen percent of those in the education curriculum reported studying five hours a week or less as compared to 10 percent of those in the professional and general curriculum.

(j) Three-fourths of the students reported that they studied at home exclusively. There was little variation by social status but considerable variation according to the presence of children. Of the male students without children, only 15.5 percent reported that they studied elsewhere than home, whereas, for those with children the figure was 38.4 percent.

(k) Forty percent of the students indicated they were not satisfied with their grade average and half of these felt the grading system was unfair. There was no variation in this response either by social status or by curriculum.

(l) Students reported a high rate of class attendance since only 23 percent reported 10 or more absences. The difference in absence rate between students who were parents and those who were not was negligible. The lower status background students were least likely to miss more than four classes whereas the highest background student were most likely to have missed five or more classes.

10. Planning of Children

(a) Two-thirds of the couples with children had not planned them. No important difference existed by social status except between the lowest group and the other categories since only 15 percent of the LSB group reported that they used no means of family limitation as compared to 33 percent of the HSB group and 21 percent of the MSB group.

(b) Although the lowest group was most apt to use contraception, they also had the highest rate of failure in the use of contraception. More than twice as many of this group reported failure as was true of the highest group.

(c) Only one-third of the Catholics said they had used some type of birth control, including rhythm method, as compared to 73 percent of the Protestants. The failure rate among those who used birth control was approximately similar since 15 percent of the Catholics and 14 percent of the Protestants reported failure.

11. Employment Patterns of Male

(a) Slightly more than two-thirds of the married college males were employed, however, only 13 percent of the total group were employed 40 hours a week or more.

(b) The LSB male student was less apt to be employed at all. If employed he was apt to work for a shorter number of hours per week, and the income from his employment constituted a smaller part of the family budget.

(c) Fathers at all social status levels were more apt to be employed than others.

(d) Students receiving G.I. bill help were less apt to be employed, since 55.7 percent of these students were working as compared to 75 percent of the other students.

(e) At every social status level, non-education students are more likely than education students to work 20 to 39 hours as well as 40 or more hours a week. The education student was most likely to be employed less than 20 hours a week.

12. Parents and In-Law Relationships

(a) Four out of five parents and the same proportion of in-laws approved of the marriage plans of the couple. One-fourth of both the parents and in-laws from the MSB grouping were neutral or disapproved of marriage plans, compared to only 11 percent of the parents from the HSB and LSB grouping and 10 percent of the in-laws of the HSB grouping and, 14 percent of the in-laws from the LSB grouping.

(b) Two-thirds of both the parents and the in-laws lived more than 50 miles from the university. Slight support was found for the hypotheses that geographic distance from parents and in-laws would be greater for high status and middle status students than for the low status student.

(c) More than three-fourths of the students did not acknowledge any financial help from parents. Where financial support was provided it was mostly for the HSB's but the total number involved in any category was small.

13. Participation in Campus Activities

(a) More than half of the respondents said they did not participate in social functions as frequently as they desired. This was especially true among the couples with children, and was found to exist at all social status levels.

(b) More than three-fourths of the couples spend 75 percent or more of their recreational time together whereas only 8 percent spend less than 25 percent of their time with their spouse in recreational pursuits. The MSB group was most familistically oriented and the HSB group was the least familistically oriented in this regard. Twice as many respondents with children as those without children spend less than 25 percent of their time in recreational activities with their mate.

(c) One-half of the married males were members of a college club or organizations. The LSB students were more likely to be members of a club than were either the HSB or the MSB group.

(d) Athletic participation showed a slight tendency to be more popular among the LSB students and among married students in the educational curriculum.

(e) The HSB group is more than twice as likely to hold membership in off-campus organizations than is either the MSB or the LSB.

14. Patterns of Wife Employment

(a) Sixty percent of the wives of the married college students were employed, three-fourths of whom worked 40 hours or more per week. The

lower the social status background of the husband the more likely was the wife to be employed outside the home.

(b) When controlled for the presence of children, approximately 53 percent of the low status background wives of children were employed as compared to 48 percent of the MSB wives and 29 percent of HSB wives.

15. Amount of Indebtedness

(a) Only 39.4 percent of the students found it necessary to borrow money, and the majority of the borrowers were indebted for less than $500.

16. Religious Participation

Approximately half of the married husbands and wives reported attending church as often as two or three times a month. Church attendance was slightly more frequent with the high social status background respondents.

17. Overall reactions to marriage

(a) Slightly less than 70 percent of the married students responded that they would advise others to marry in college, one-fourth replied they would not, and slightly more than 5 percent were undecided. The LSB group was most positive in their response, whereas the HSB group was most negative in their response.

(b) Children were not found to be a negative factor in the willingness of married students to recommend a combination of marriage and college.

18. Adjustment to Presence of Children

(a) Low status background married males were more apt to regard children as an aid to family adjustment and less likely to look at them as

a handicap compared to the other groups. Similarly, the LSB student father was less apt to feel that children affected his study habits than were the student fathers in other categories.

(b) The presence of children is directly related to a feeling that children aid family adjustment. That is, 43 percent of the couples with children compared to only 17 percent of the couples without children felt that children aid family adjustment. Only 17 percent of the couples with children compared to 39 percent of the couples without children felt that children are a definite handicap.

(c) The lower the social status, the higher the percentage of married males who feel that children aid marital adjustment.

19. Reaction to College Housing

The great majority of students praised the convenience and economy of campus housing.

20. Major Conclusions

(a) In a university heavily skewed toward the lower end of the social class spectrum the married students had a social status background slightly lower than the single students. The difference was too small to prove the hypothesis that college marriage is primarily a refuge for youth of lower class origin but the question should be regarded as still open. Possibly a similar study in a college with a larger proportion of upper class students might substantiate this hypothesis.

(b) Important differences by social status background were found in the education of the wife, her tendency to continue her studies and in whether or not the couple met on the campus. For male students social status background is linked to differences in curriculum and career choice, the extent of employment while in school and the trend of grades in college as compared to high school. For these areas at least, the hypothesis of the effect of social status background on college adjustment seems to be warranted.

(c) Several areas of adjustment were problems to married students from all three social status levels. Financial problems were present at all levels with little indication of parental help. Three-fourths of the male students and sixty percent of their wives were employed, many of them for forty hours a week or more. Students complained about inadequate social life and limited time with their families. Students with children had more of a tendency to study away from home and they were employed for the greatest number of hours per week. Although there was some variation by status levels there was a pronounced tendency for marriage to end the wife's education at all levels. Thus, there are a number of situations difficult for married students to handle which do not appear to be status linked.